



## Inmate Telephone Service

Acting on its mandate to ensure that rates for phone calls are just, reasonable and fair for all Americans, the FCC is working to rein in the excessive rates and egregious fees on phone calls paid by some of society's most vulnerable: people trying to stay in touch with loved ones serving time in jail or prison.

In most cases, inmates' telephone calling options are limited to one or more of the following calling types: collect, debit account or pre-paid account. Also, incarcerated persons typically may not choose their long distance service provider. These factors, combined with unrestricted long-distance rates, often result in unreasonably high phone bills for inmates' families.

### **New rate caps for interstate calls from prisons**

On October 22, 2015, the FCC took action to reduce rate caps for local and in-state long-distance inmate calling, cutting its existing cap on interstate long-distance calls by up to 50 percent. The FCC also closed loopholes by barring most add-on fees imposed by inmate calling service (ICS) providers, which can add nearly 40% to the cost of a single call, and set strict limits on the few fees that remain.

New caps will reduce the average rates for the vast majority of inmate calls substantially, from \$2.96 to no more than \$1.65 for a 15-minute intrastate call for most calls, and from \$3.15 to no more than \$1.65 for most 15-minute interstate calls.

The rules affecting prisons take effect March 17, 2016, and the rules affecting jails take effect June 20, 2016.

### **Current rate caps for interstate calls from prisons**

Current FCC rate caps for interstate calls are:

- \$0.25 per minute for collect calls
- \$0.21 per minute for debit or pre-paid calls

This equates to a per-call rate cap (including per-call charges) of:

- \$3.75 for a 15-minute call
- \$3.15 for a 15-minute debit or pre-paid call

Charges on inmate calls that exceed the interstate rate caps are in violation of federal rules.

In addition, providers of inmate calling services are prohibited from assessing any additional charges or fees when the inmate must use Telecommunications Relay Service equipment. (TRS is a telephone service that allows people with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls. Read our TRS guide at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/articles/205332300-Inmate-Telephone-Service>.)

Moreover, no inmate calling service provider may block a collect call solely because it lacks a prior billing relationship with the called party's telephone provider unless the provider also offers debit, pre-paid or pre-paid collect calling options.

FCC rules require that when an inmate places a collect call each operator service provider must identify itself to the person receiving the call before connecting the call. Each operator service provider must also disclose, before connecting the call, how the receiving party may obtain rate quotations. Additionally, the operator service provider must permit the receiving party to terminate the telephone call at no charge before the call is connected. These rules apply only to interstate operator service provider calls.

### **Judicial review of other ICS rules**

On Jan. 13, 2014, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit issued a partial stay of the Order establishing the new inmate calling service rules. Specifically, three of the rules ("Cost-Based Rates for Inmate Calling Services," "Interim Safe Harbor" and "Annual Reporting and Certification Requirement") are not in effect, pending further judicial review.

### **Filing a complaint**

If you feel you or a family member has been overcharged by an inmate calling service provider, you can file a complaint with the FCC. You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission  
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division  
445 12th Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

### **Other resources**

Most states have similar rules for intrastate (within a state) OSP calls. To complain about rates for intrastate collect calls from public phones in prisons, contact the state public utility commission in the state where the call originated and terminated. State public utility commission addresses may be found at [www.naruc.org/Commissions](http://www.naruc.org/Commissions) or in the blue pages or government section of your local telephone directory.

### **Accessible formats**

To request this article in an accessible format - braille, large print, Word or text document or audio - write or call us at the address or phone number above, or send an email to [fcc504@fcc.gov](mailto:fcc504@fcc.gov).

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